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## The nomenclature question.

### On the application of "once a synonym always a synonym" to binomials.

Reviewing in the March number of the GAZETTE the recently published "List of Pteridophyta and Spermatophyta," I made the following statement: "It will always be possible for an erratic botanist to throw together large genera like *Aster* and *Erigeron*, *Bidens* and *Coreopsis*, *Panicum* and *Paspalum*, thereby displacing [in accordance with the Madison rules] many specific names which according to the rule of once a synonym always a synonym can never be revived." Criticising my position Mr. Coville in the April number of this journal pronounces this a lamentable error. Although he has quoted my statement accurately he appears to have overlooked the important word "*specific*," which it contains, since to prove its deplorable inaccuracy he advances merely some well-known and wholly irrelevant generalizations regarding *generic* names. Although it should have been clear to every careful reader that the case under discussion had to do with specific names, the point which I wished to make is somewhat technical and perhaps should have further elaboration.

When two large genera, like *Cacalia* and *Senecio*, or *Carduus* and *Cnicus*, are united, a certain number of valid species of like specific name are brought under the same generic name and a part of them of course must receive new specific names. If now the same genera are separated the question of the restoration of the displaced specific names arises at once and on this point the Rochester and Madison rules appear to lead to a curious dilemma. This can only be made clear by examples.

Let us suppose that *Panicum* and *Paspalum* are united by A in 1895 under the former name. As there are at present both a *Panicum dissitiflorum* Steudel (1841) and a *Paspalum dissitiflorum* Trinius (1826), it is evident that one must be renamed. At Madison it was decided that in such cases it is not the age of the combination but the age of the specific name which should be the determining factor, so that the *dissitiflorum* of Trinius would have preference even under

the changed generic name, and A would accordingly rename *Panicum dissitiflorum* Steud.; the two species thus becoming, we will say, 1. *Panicum dissitiflorum* (Trinius) A. 1895. = *Paspalum dissitiflorum* Trinius. 1826. 2. *Panicum Steudelii* A. 1895. = *Panicum dissitiflorum* Steudel. 1841.

Suppose that in 1896 B separates the two genera. May he, according to the Rochester and Madison rules and the principle of once a synonym always a synonym, re-instate *Panicum dissitiflorum* Steud.? Discussing this point at Madison with a member of the nomenclature committee, I was informed that a name so displaced could never be re-established, since, to continue our example, there exists in 1896 a *Panicum dissitiflorum* (Trin.) A, with an older specific name than *Panicum dissitiflorum* Steud. Now this interpretation of the rules must be either right or wrong. If it is correct I must reiterate that it would give to any erratic writer the power of forever displacing valid specific names, since there is no limit to which large related genera can be brought together, and the Rochester and Madison codes do not permit exceptions and least of all personal distinctions in the application of their rules, so that it would make no difference whatever who united the genera or whether he had any real scientific basis for his judgment. If, on the other hand, the interpretation is wrong and my informant was in error, it is certainly an unfortunate rule which is not uniformly understood even by all the members of the committee that frames it. And furthermore, if we admit that *Panicum dissitiflorum* Steud. could be restored, does it not show inconsistency in the application of the rules? For in uniting the two genera it is the age of the specific names, as we are told, that determines which of two specific homonyms may stand. In separating the same genera and applying the principle of once a synonym always a synonym this factor would be totally neglected and a species would be re-instated notwithstanding the fact that there would be an older and identical specific name at that time in the genus. It is worthy of note that in this matter as in some others the uniform adoption of the first correct combination—a most healthful check to the undesirable effects of unlimited priority—would readily obviate the difficulty.

Considering the fact that the "List of Pteridophyta and Spermatophyta" has not, to my knowledge, received as yet the formal sanction of any considerable or representative body of

American botanists, and that its intent, as understood by many members of the Botanical Club of the American Association and by some at least of the nomenclature committee, was not to establish the Rochester and Madison rules but to show their outcome and give a better basis for their discussion, I must express considerable surprise at the following sentence of Mr. Coville's criticism of my review: "Now that they [the principles] have been adopted by overwhelming majorities in democratic botanical assemblages, we may ask whether Dr. Robinson's protest is not out of place." Certainly to object to the discussion of this subject and to rule out the expression of any opinion at variance with the new rules is as unscientific as it is undemocratic.—B. L. ROBINSON.

### **Recommendations regarding the nomenclature of systematic botany.**

[A circular with the above title has recently been issued by Dr. B. L. Robinson, curator of the Gray herbarium. We republish the recommendations, omitting the prefatory remarks and arguments. The paper is signed by seventy-four botanists "of various degrees of repute"—to use Mr. Rand's expression regarding the supporters of the Rochester agreement.—EDS.]

1. Ordinal names, having been established by long usage, should not be subjected to revision upon theoretical grounds.

2. Long-established and generally known generic names . . . should be retained. The scope of this rule is left to the discretion of writers. . . .

3. In specific nomenclature the first correct combination is to be preferred. . . . For these reasons it seems best to adopt the principle of priority under the genus. It is to be emphasized, however, that this ruling does not lessen the obligation of botanists of the present and future in making a transfer of a species from one genus to another to preserve scrupulously the specific name without alteration, except in the case of an existing homonym.

4. The varietal name is to be regarded as inferior in rank to the specific. . . . No specific name should be altered, because of preexisting varietal names for the same plant. Nevertheless, it is recommended as a working rule that whenever a variety is raised to specific or a species depressed to varietal rank the name should be preserved whenever possible.

5. The principle of "once a synonym always a synonym," while recommended as an excellent working rule for present and future, may not justly be made retroactive.